

Asthma

What is asthma?

- Asthma is a serious, chronic lung disease that causes episodes of breathlessness, wheezing, coughing and tightness in the chest.
- It affects about one in 15 American children and is the leading cause of absenteeism in Indiana schools.

What causes asthma?

- A mix of environmental, genetic and other factors cause asthma, but a child does not typically develop the disease until an infection or allergen triggers it.
- Infections, exercise, weather, emotions, allergies and other environmental triggers can bring about asthma attacks.

What are some of the most common asthma triggers and how can you avoid them?

- **Cigarette smoke** and second-hand smoke can trigger asthma.
Make it a habit to:
 - Avoid smoking in your home or car and do not allow others to do so.
 - Refrain from smoking around children at all times.
- **Dust mites** live in mattresses, pillows, carpets, furniture, clothes and stuffed toys and are found in every home.
Make it a habit to:
 - Choose washable stuffed toys, wash them often in hot water and dry thoroughly.
 - Wash sheets and blankets once a week in hot water and cover mattresses and pillows in dust-proof covers.
- **Skin flakes**, urine and saliva from your family pets can easily trigger asthma attacks.
Make it a habit to:
 - Keep pets outdoors and, if necessary, find them a new home.
 - Limit their contact with fabric-covered furniture, carpets and stuffed toys and bar them from the bedroom.
- **Molds** grow on damp materials. Stop their growth by lowering the moisture in your home, a practice that also helps reduce other asthma triggers such as dust mites.
Make it a habit to:
 - Maintain low indoor humidity by implementing proper ventilation systems, such as exhaust fans.
 - Use exhaust fans or open windows in kitchens and bathrooms when showering, cooking or using the dishwasher and remember to vent clothes dryers to the outside.
- **Pest droppings** or body parts of pests such as cockroaches or rodents are serious asthma triggers.
Make it a habit to:
 - Use gel baits, boric acid (for cockroaches) or non-chemical traps before using pesticide sprays.
 - Store food in airtight containers and clean up all food crumbs or spilled liquids right away.

What kinds of treatments are available for asthma sufferers?

- Asthma can be controlled, but not cured. Develop an asthma management plan with your child's doctor that includes medications, the avoidance of common triggers and a home treatment plan. This plan will help you keep your child's asthma under control.
- Your child's doctor can prescribe medication to prevent wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath, which can also control these symptoms during an asthma attack.

Where can I get more information?

- Contact IDEM's Children's Environmental Health coordinator at (800) 451-6027 ext. 35628 or visit IDEM's Web site at www.in.gov/idem/kids/envhealth to get more information on how to improve your home's indoor air quality.
- Call (800) 451-6027 ext. 3-5628 for information on how your school can join the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Tools for School program, which helps schools prevent, solve and diagnose indoor air quality problems, which could aggravate asthmatic students' symptoms.
- Call the Indiana Family Helpline at (800) 433-0746 to find a doctor that can help you develop an asthma management plan or for more information on asthma, check out the American Lung Association's Web site at www.lungusa.org/asthma/.